Patenting of Basmati Rice

661. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that grant of patent of Basmati Rice to Texan Company Rice Tec Inc by the US Patent office in 1997 led to protests in the country;

(b) if so, whether any follow-up action has been taken by Government to build up a case for Basmati Rice;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) what permanent steps are proposed to be taken to protect our Bio-diversity and prevent Bio-piracy; and

(e) whether any legislation in the matter is on the anvil; if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY (SHRI SIKANDER BAKHT): (a) to (c) The grant of patent to M/s. Rice Tec Inc., Texas, USA on Basmati Rice Lines and Grains by United States Patent Office has been viewed with concern in India.

However, patents are granted by respective Governments under their patent laws and rights thereunder are restricted to the territorial boundary of that country. Whenever information is received about patents being taken on certain products which are not considered patentable, steps are taken to assess whether grant of patent can be challenged. An exercise is going on to assess whether the grant of this patent can be challenged.

(d) and (e) In order to protect our biodiversity and prevent bio-piracy, a legislation on biodiversity, with the broad objectives of conservation, sustainable utilisation of biological diversity, and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of biological resources, is being formulated by the Ministry of Environment and Forests.

Closure of Non-performing PSUs

662. SHRI J. CHITHARANJAN: SHRI GURUDAS DASGUPTA: Will the Minister of INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have decided to close down ten non-performing and non-functioning Public Sector Units;

(b) if so, which are these units and the number of workers estimated to be rendered unemployed; and

(c) the steps being taken to clear their wages and other statutory dues?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY (SHRI SUKHBIR SINGH BADAL): (a) to (c) The Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR) has, at one stage or the other come to provisional/final conclusion that it would be just and equitable to wind up 8 Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) under the Department of Heavy Industry namely Mining & Allied Machinery Corporation Ltd. (MAMC), National Bicycle Corporation of India Ltd. (NBCIL), Cycle Corporation of India Ltd. (CCIL), Bharat Opthalmic Glass Ltd. (BOGL), National Instruments Ltd. (NIL), Weighbird India Ltd. (WIL), Tannery & Footwear Corporation Ltd. (TAFCO) and Bharat Process & Mechanical Engineering Ltd. (BPME). BIFR is a quasi-judicial body. In the case of Rehabilitation Industries Corporation Ltd. (RIC), Disinvestment Commission has recommended discontinuance of operations. With a view to mitigate the hardship of employees, Government have taken a decision to introduce Voluntary Separation Scheme by extending benefits of VRS to employees in these unviable PSUs. Statutory Dues alongwith the VRS benefits will also be paid. Initially the scheme was introduced for 3 months. However, Government have decided to extend it by another 3 months the initial offer of Voluntary Separation Scheme